

but to take electoral power away from the people and put it in the hands of politicians and bureaucrats. It is a top-down approach that, if implemented, would centralize control over elections in direct contravention to the Constitution, destroy barriers to voter fraud, and enable radical activists to harass and intimidate their political opponents. It is the sort of power grab you would expect a cartoon villain to conduct, but here we are, debating this in the U.S. Senate.

When you dive into the specifics, it really gets worse. Here are some things that it would do.

The bill would, indeed, ban voter ID requirements and force States to allow ballot harvesting schemes.

The Federal Election Commission, which for the moment is a balanced, bipartisan Agency, would morph into a partisan, prosecutorial body, ready to be weaponized against the political minority.

Instead of living or dying by the support of loyal donors, under this new scheme, political campaigns would receive public money payouts, which they could then use to promote whatever message they pleased no matter how objectionable it might be to the taxpayers, who would be funding those campaigns.

Speaking of those donors, if you have ever wondered who was behind a particular campaign, this bill has you covered. It includes new restrictions on political speech in the form of a donor disclosure mandate. Say goodbye to anonymous political activity in the tradition of the Federalist Papers and the civil rights movement. This is cancel culture on steroids, and if the Democrats have their way, this is what is coming to a precinct near you.

Of course, the centralization of power on this scale will require a laundry list of regulations, and on that front, S. 1 does not disappoint. The requirements shoved onto local and State officials are so burdensome and impractical that I refuse to believe anyone involved in the drafting has ever staffed a polling place. Certainly, they have never served as volunteers on a county election commission. That is something I had the honor of doing a couple of decades ago.

If they get their way, the same automatic registration procedures that failed voters in California and in Illinois are coming to a county elections office in your neighborhood.

Felons will regain their right to vote in Federal elections, but no one seems willing to explain how they expect State officials to prevent them from voting in down-ballot races.

Elections officials will have the pleasure of purchasing new paper-backed voting machines just as soon as those machines come into existence. That is right. This bill mandates the use of technology that hasn't hit the marketplace.

Speaking of theoretical technology, for some reason, the drafters of this

bill also thought it would be a good idea to force States to invent new technology to support automated voter registration by phone.

Elections are not easy events to stand up. County officials and volunteers work year-round to ensure that polling places are staffed and safe, that machines are functional, and that volunteers are well trained to recognize illegal electioneering and fraud. Over the years, State and local authorities have found their own solutions to these challenges. When those solutions fail, we have the ability to implement Federal backstops against voter suppression and election mishandling.

Everyone has his own role to play. These roles are outlined in the Constitution for a reason—because the Founders knew that any detached Federal bureaucracy would lack the competence to solve the unique logistical challenges my Democratic colleagues are trying to use as proof that Congress must step in to burn down yet another institution of our democracy. That is the constitutional imperative of the States to set the time, place, and manner of elections.

If we continue to go down this road, this partisan fever dream will become codified chaos that will trickle all the way down to the precinct level and irreparably erode confidence in the electoral process.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President and my colleagues, there is a saying about Afghanistan: that we have turned the corner toward victory so many times that we are spinning in circles.

During the beginning of my time in Congress, I went to Afghanistan to visit our troops and military leadership about every 2 years. Each time I went, I was met by a new, capable, impressive general who had just started his yearlong tour, who told me that the last general did it wrong and that, this time, everything was going to be different. I remember coming back from my third trip to Afghanistan—I think it was in 2011—convinced that it was time to leave. The primary mission had been accomplished. Within a few years of our invasion, al-Qaida in Afghanistan had been reduced to a shell of its former self, and we had really shifted to a new mission: nation-building. At the outset, there was reason for us to stay and engage in that mission and to work with the new Afghan Government to help get it on its own feet, but, by 2011, that mission had, for all intents and purposes, become a permanent one.

Now, after 20 years of war and handwringing about when the right time is to leave, we have to acknowledge some basic truths: Our military presence in Afghanistan is not creating the conditions necessary to eradicate the Taliban or the conditions necessary to create a fully functional Afghan military or government.

In fact, the facts on the ground would tell you the opposite is true: The longer we stay, the more powerful the Taliban becomes and the less willing the Afghan Government appears to be to make the hard choices to stand on its own.

We can pretend that another year is going to change this, but it won't. "Just a little bit more time" has become the rinse-and-repeat phrase of the Afghanistan hawks, but to stay any longer is really—let's be honest—a decision to stay forever, and that is something the American people do not support.

I want to tell you one story from my trip to Afghanistan in 2011 that helped to confirm my belief that something was very wrong about our policy there. I went with a bipartisan delegation. I was in the House at the time. We visited a far-off Province in western Afghanistan—a small town called Parmakan—and we were there to visit a group of Army commandos who toured us around this village. They were protecting the farmers in this village from Taliban attack. They attested to us that the attacks had largely stopped, and in the place of those attacks had matured a commerce between the Taliban forces that surrounded the village and the farmers of the village. As we walked around this village, we made our way through fields of these beautiful, beautiful, colorful flowers.

I turned to my colleague next to me, and I asked him if he had a sense as to what this crop was.

He said: I think I do, but let's confirm.

So we asked one of the village elders what they were harvesting in these fields.

Poppy, he told us.

Our U.S. military forces were protecting the poppy trade in this western Province of Afghanistan—in fact, protecting the ability of the Taliban to come in and purchase that poppy in order to fuel the insurgency that we were fighting. Our troops were literally being utilized to protect the revenue source of our enemy. And so no wonder our policy in Afghanistan appears circular. In many ways, it is and it has been for a very long time.

But even for those who disagree with me and contest that our presence there has actually helped facilitate the survival of the Taliban, what evidence is there that staying for another few years is going to make the key difference?

The American war in Afghanistan is nearly 20 years old. It is the longest war in U.S. history, outlasting the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II, and the Korean war combined.

The United States and other international donors have invested an extraordinary amount of money and effort and blood to help stand up a functioning Afghan Government and civil society. And yet that government has

failed to get widespread support from the Afghan people. There are many reasons for this, but there is one big one: corruption. And the billions upon billions of dollars that are pumped into the Afghan economy by U.S. taxpayers often never find their way to actually helping the people of that country. Too much of our aid has been syphoned off by local leaders and unintentionally we have helped establish a system of corruption that has become so pervasive and so predatory that people have, frankly, become less resistant to Taliban inroads.

Without a functioning police force, local Governors establish their own militias, and the mafia-style system that has developed has led to this vast drug trafficking network, fueled by corruption and that poppy production I talked about.

This has distorted Afghanistan's economy, and it has, frankly, neutralized a lot of our economic aid. And yet the United States often, over the course of the last 20 years, has tolerated these warlords, these drug traffickers, and these corrupt defense contractors inside Afghanistan because we consider the enemy of our enemy to be our friend. Our entire mission there has often been built on a self-defeating strategy.

In fact, what began as a vital mission to eliminate the threat of those who attacked us on September 11 has now, in some ways, become a symbol of nearly everything that is wrong with American foreign policy. Our armed presence in Afghanistan epitomizes this hubristic myth around the power of U.S. troops abroad; that they can completely dismantle terrorist networks by force, install and cultivate a stable democratic government, and eliminate rampant corruption and illegal drug cultivation.

Two decades and nearly \$2 trillion dollars of spending later, we have seen the limitations of those fantastical assumptions. Our generals have offered PowerPoint presentation after PowerPoint presentation on how this time it is going to be different, but it never is because the failure really isn't in the execution. The failure has been in the design.

A few thousand troops—and that is what we have there today—cannot deliver security and political stability to a complex, multicultural, multilingual nation, long resistant to centralized rule, on the other side of the world.

We were right to pursue the al-Qaida terrorists who attacked us on September 11, but that mission is completed, and it is time to face facts about the limitations of American military power in Afghanistan and bring our troops home.

Now, let's be clear, al-Qaida still wants to harm the United States, but the threat that they pose today is nowhere near what it was 20 years ago when they attacked our Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, bombed the USS *Cole*, and killed thousands of Americans on September 11.

Intelligence estimates tell us that in Afghanistan, there may be only 200, 300, maybe 400 al-Qaida members total. The organization is no longer capable of planning large-scale attacks against the United States. That is what our intelligence estimates tell us. And, frankly, there are far more al-Qaida members today in other countries, like Yemen, for instance. Does that mean that we should also plant huge numbers of U.S. troops in every place where there are security vacuums to eliminate the terrorist threat from those countries? Of course not.

After two decades of the War on Terror, we have made a ton of mistakes, but we have also gotten a lot better in terms of our intelligence capabilities and our ability to strike against a terrorist threat absent a huge in-country presence. Why not apply that lesson learned to Afghanistan?

To their credit, the Trump administration was right to finally call it like it is and state that the U.S. presence in Afghanistan couldn't and shouldn't continue forever.

But as usual, the Trump team didn't put in the work to ensure that we could do this responsibly by their deadline of May 1. So a 4-month extension, announced by President Biden, will give us the space needed, not to magically accomplish what we haven't been able to do in 20 years but to realistically chart out the operational plans for pulling out the 2,500 troops whom we still have there.

Now, finally, I want to be honest. When we withdraw, there is a real possibility the situation in Afghanistan is going to get worse. It is likely that fighting between the Afghan Government and the Taliban escalates. At that point, either the Afghan Government will have to lead the fight without the crutch of American support or the government could collapse.

But this is the key point: That has been the dynamic for the last 15 years, and it is going to continue to be the dynamic for the next 15 years. It wouldn't be any different if we had stayed for another 5 years, another 20 years, or another year. There is simply no evidence to suggest that things are going to change. After 20 years and billions of dollars of investment in the Afghan Government, the onus has to be on them to get their act together and to earn the support of the people.

And one last point, being in Afghanistan is a choice, a choice to not focus on other theaters that present more serious threats to international norms, global stability, and American security. It bogs America down having 2,500 troops there and thousands more contractors and billions of dollars. It bogs us down in a theater that, frankly, just matters less to us today than it did years ago.

Just within the last few days, China has leveled new threats to the territorial integrity of its neighbors; Russia is amassing thousands of troops on the border of Ukraine; and there are new

worries about a potential attack on NATO member states.

And remember, counterterrorism officials and our daily newsfeed remind us that the most serious threat to America today is actually not from foreign terrorist organizations but from domestic groups.

We spend more money than any other nation in the world on security, but even given the gargantuan size of our global military footprint, we cannot and should not be everywhere. We need to make choices every now and again, and right now it is fantasy, not reality, that undergirds an argument to stay in Afghanistan for another 10 years or 5 years or even another year.

A big part of being President is making tough choices, and today President Biden has made the right one to end this war.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FILIBUSTER

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, the new power dynamic in Washington has brought about a frenzy of proposed institutional changes by our friends across the aisle.

The American people elected a Democratic President, that is true; they reduced the Democratic majority in the House; and elected a 50-50 Senate. In all of Congress, there are seven more Democrats than Republicans. That is all—7 out of 535 Members.

Despite these tight margins, our friends on the other side have tried to characterize this new power dynamic as a mandate, and they have floated a tsunami of rule changes to go along with it. First came the push to eliminate the filibuster.

Just a few years ago, the idea of such a radical change terrified our Democratic colleagues. We certainly didn't do it when we were in a position to do it, notwithstanding the encouragement of President Trump.

When Republicans held control of the Senate, the House, and the White House, as our Democratic colleagues do now, our friends on the other side of the aisle feared the filibuster would come tumbling down. They were so concerned, in fact, that 33 of our colleagues signed on to a letter insisting that the filibuster be preserved. Leader MCCONNELL agreed. He never wavered to pressure from anyone, even the President, to eliminate the filibuster. He has been around this Chamber and this Senate a long time, and he knows that what goes around comes around.

As the leader correctly noted, Democrats didn't just spend the last 4 years supporting the filibuster, they took every advantage of the opportunity for